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QING HISTORY IN AMERICA: PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PRESENT TRENDS

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# **HUMANITIES WORKING PAPER 109**

December 1984

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Fifty years ago, Chinese history hardly existed as a field of study in the United States. In 1935, there were no more than a dozen active American sinologists of whom only one or two were historians.<sup>1</sup> Today there are over sixteen hundred members of the Association of Asian Studies who study China, of whom at least seven hundred are historians and one hundred are social scientists who work extensively with historical material.<sup>2</sup> Chinese studies has made vast strides largely under the banner of area studies. History, especially Qing history, has predominated. Qing historians have their own journal and their own professional association with a membership of well over three hundred individuals.<sup>3</sup> They account for almost half of all Chinese historians and receive the bulk of all historical funding.<sup>4</sup>

What explains the attractions of Qing history?<sup>5</sup> The general attraction, of course, is that the Qing was the last imperial dynasty from 1644 to 1911. As the last phase of China's old regime and the first phase of China's modernization, Qing history provides a crucial contrast for any study of early or contemporary China. But, the Qing is also significant for a number of more specific reasons. First, between 1650 and 1800, China doubled in territory to reach its present dimensions. Second, between 1700 and 1900, China tripled in population to reach almost 500 million people. Finally, despite the collapse of

the imperial order by the early twentieth century, traditional political, economic, and social institutions attained greater maturity and the economy and society achieved a greater degree of interregional integration under the Qing than ever before. In consequence, as recent works by American historians have shown, the Qing has great intrinsic significance to our understanding of China's geographic size, its large population, its enduring empire, and its long traditions in thought and art.<sup>6</sup>

As Professor Fairbank has shown, Qing history also has great extrinsic importance in the United States.<sup>7</sup> The confrontation between China and the West began during the Qing and continues today. The impetus behind Qing studies, therefore, came from the perceived need to understand the sources and possible resolutions of this heritage. It was only natural that American historians accordingly focused much of their efforts on diplomatic history and the history of the Western presence, largely missionaries, merchants, and soldiers, in Qing China.<sup>8</sup> It is here that we have probably made our greatest contributions to Chinese history.<sup>9</sup> The state of these fields in the United States defines the state of the art.

Perhaps because of these accomplishments, Qing history is still an isolated field of inquiry, a consequence of orientalism. No matter what is said to the contrary, our preoccupation with public policy and public education has not allowed much dialogue with other historians in the United States, or in China as well. Recent advances in the social and economic history of the Qing, however, promise to bridge the gap

between the history of China and the history of the rest of the world and to build a dialogue between American and Chinese historians. The "vogue" for social science history which now flourishes on both sides of the Pacific, combined with the discovery of vast quantities of unusually rich documentation in Qing historical archives, have already begun to yield fundamental findings of great significance to Chinese history and comparative interest to world history.<sup>10</sup>

American and Chinese historians have begun major endeavors in such diverse fields of Qing history as population history; climate history;<sup>11</sup> price and wage history;<sup>12</sup> the history of collective action, especially rebellion;<sup>13</sup> and the history of state economic policies, especially food redistribution.<sup>14</sup> Today, I only have time for an extremely brief survey of the field I know best, Qing population history.<sup>15</sup> But I draw your attention to a panel Sunday morning on the State and Subsistence in Eighteenth Century Asia which describes the state of that field in Qing history.

Publications indicate how the field of population history has grown in China as well as in the United States. In both countries, the pattern is one of recent explosion. Table one summarizes the dates of publications in population history over the last fifty years (1935-1984) in five year groups, approximately half of which cover the Qing. The number of books and articles has risen on average from less than two a year from 1935 to 1974, to almost five a year from 1975 to 1979, and over twenty-seven a year from 1980 to 1984. In the last five years we have published more on the population history of China than in the

preceding forty-five years. This flood of publications in population history will continue and may even accelerate for many years to come.

The majority of these publications are in Chinese. But Americans are making many of the significant contributions; in part because of better training in demographic and quantitative methods; in part because of their broader orientation towards the social sciences. Recent American works of Qing history on such distinct topics as kinship, spatial networks, migration, economic growth, and social stratification have relied heavily on demographic indices.<sup>16</sup> These studies in Qing population history have an impact ranging far beyond narrow demographic issues. They have already replaced the traditional static picture of Qing China with a variegated landscape characterized by high geographic mobility and quick response to changes in economic conditions.

At the moment, the most detailed demographic studies come from eighteenth and nineteenth century Manchuria and nineteenth and twentieth century Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> In spite of the tremendous differences in space and time, a number of common findings have already begun to emerge, some of which support popular images of Chinese population, others of which are unexpected. Together they provide a demographic answer to the question posed by Professor Keightly, 'What was particularly Chinese about China, and how did these particularly Chinese characteristics develop?'<sup>18</sup> As a preliminary answer, I list six characteristics common to both populations;<sup>19</sup> I could list many more: first, that the vast majority of the population lived in complex grand

households alternating between parents and their married children, and married brothers living together; second, that female marriage was early and universal; third, that fertility was low by premodern standards; fourth, that mortality was high especially among infants and among the aged; fifth, that male and female infanticide was a major cause of high infant mortality; sixth and finally, that the pattern of infanticide was closely linked to the complex household structure. Large households, especially in Manchuria, were far more prone than small households to practice infanticide. Indeed, each type of complex household has its own distinctive pattern of infanticide, which appears to have been a strategy of family limitation imposed by household patriarchs on younger conjugal couples under their authority. The decision to kill a newborn child was often not made by the biological parents.

These findings suggest an important comparative model of population dynamics. What we see is an unusual East Asian variant from the popular Malthusian model. According to Malthus, population growth is a function of either mortality, which he termed a positive check, or fertility and nuptiality, which he termed preventive checks. By contrast, in China population growth was regulated by deliberate birth control through infanticide. Neonatal mortality, in other words, functioned as a preventive rather than a positive check? Historians have sought in vain for a direct link between household structure and family planning in early modern Europe.<sup>20</sup> Now they can find one, of sorts, in Qing China.

Future work, of course, will amend these preliminary findings and link them to other social and economic variables. As similar progress is made in other endeavors in social science history, we can look forward to the day when all the new fields of Qing history intersect. The combination of population history with climate history, price and wage history, collective action, and state policy will ultimately lead to new syntheses of Chinese history with far reaching consequences for world history.



## END NOTES

\* I would like to begin with an acknowledgement and a warning. First, the warning: I make no attempt in this short article to survey the entire field of Qing studies in the United States. Instead, I focus almost exclusively on social science history, in particular, population history. Even here, I make no attempt at inclusive citation. I append a complete bibliography on Chinese population history in the appendix.

Second, the acknowledgement: Jon Gjerde, Nicholas Dirks, R. Bin Wong, and Sandra Wong read and commented extensively on a preliminary draft of this essay for which I am very grateful. Barbara Calli prepared the table. In addition, many colleagues here and abroad contributed numerous bibliographic references to my appendix. I would particularly like to thank John Aird, Ge Jianxiong, Guo Songyi, Shi Nianhai, Paul Smith, Tian Yuqing, and Chu-mi Wiens. I would also like to thank three friends who generously made material available to me from their respective institutions: Tai-loi Ma of the Far Eastern Library at the University of Chicago; Ramon Myers of the East Asian Library at the Hoover Institute; and Chu-Mi Wiens of the Orientalia Division at the Library of Congress.

1 "Proceedings and Memoranda relating to the Promotion of Chinese Studies," Bulletin of the American Council of Learned Societies 10 (April 1929). I would like to thank Jason Parker of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) for making this source available to me.

2 The 1984 membership directory of the Association of Asian Studies lists historians by area of primary interest. The estimate of social scientists who work extensively with Chinese historical material is derived from a report by Gilbert Rozman, "A Survey of Human Resources in Social Science Studies of Traditional China" to the Committee on Studies of Chinese Civilization, ACLS in 1975. Again I would like to thank Jason Parker for making this survey available to me.

3 I have compiled these figures from the June 1984 Membership Directory of the Society for Qing Studies.

4 I base this statement on information graciously supplied me by Sophie Sa of the Social Science Research Council and Jason Parker of the American Council of Learned Societies.

5 The attractions of Qing history are best described by Ping-ti Ho, "The Significance of the Ch'ing Period in Chinese History," Journal of Asian Studies 26.2 (February 1967): 189-95. I merely summarize his analysis here.

6 See, for example, Ho Ping-ti, The Ladder of Success in Imperial China (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Ho, Ping-ti. Studies on the Population of China, 1368-1953 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959); and G. William Skinner, The City in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977).

7 His most recent example is John King Fairbank, "The Growth of Chinese History in American Minds," a centennial address presented at this same panel on Chinese Historical Studies in America, a centennial session of the American Historical Association Anniversary Meeting, Chicago, 29 December 1984.

8 It is fitting that the only substantive panel specifically on East Asia at the centennial anniversary meeting of the American Historical Association is entitled Changing Views of East Asian Diplomacy.

9 The Cambridge History of China edited by J.K. Fairbank and D.C. Twitchett, 4 vols to date provide an comprehensive introduction to the state of these fields. See especially Volume 10 Late Ch'ing, 1800-1900, Part One edited by J.K. Fairbank; and Volume 11 Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part Two edited by J. K. Fairbank and K.C. Liu.

10 These archives contained numerous sources of great importance to all facets of Qing history. The central Qing archives alone contain almost ten million documents: over eight million in Beijing, almost one million in Taipei, and almost half a million in Shenyang. In addition, there are probably at least an equal number of Qing documents in provincial archives most of which have yet to be explored.

11 At present, the only new field in Qing history where the Chinese have taken a commanding lead is climate history. I should, however, acknowledge that much of this work is being done by meteorologists and historical geographers, not historians. For a recent example in English see Wang Shaowu and Zhao Zongci, "Drought and Floods in China, 1470-1979," in Climate and History, coedited by T.M.L. Wrigley, M.J. Imgram, and G. Farmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 271-288. This article is an analysis of the recent atlas entitled Zhongguo jin wubai nian hanlao fenbu tuiji (The Drought and Flood Charts of China from 1470 to 1979) (Beijing: Ditu, 1981).

12 The work by Y.C. Wang and his colleagues lead this field. I recommend in particular his forthcoming article, "Grain Prices and Marketing Regions in Ch'ing China," Region, State, and Enterprise in Chinese Economic History, 980-1980, coedited by Robert Hartwell, Albert Feuerwerker, and Robert F. Dernberger (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

13 Frederic Wakeman "Rebellion and Revolution: The Study of Popular Movements in Chinese History," Journal of Asian Studies 36.2 (February 1977) is an excellent recent summary of the state of this field.

14 See W. Plow, State Granaries and Food Supply in Qing China, 1650-1850 coedited by R. Bin Wong, Pierre-Etienne Will, and James Lee (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, forthcoming).

15 My analysis of Qing population history derives from a forthcoming article, coauthored with William Lavelly, entitled "Chinese Demography: The State of the Field," to be published in the Journal of Asian Studies.

16 See the articles and books by Richard Barrett, Mark Elvin, John Fei, Robert Hartwell, Ping-ti Ho, Dwight Perkins, Robert Eng, Stevan Harrell, James Lee, Liu Ts'ui-jung, Burton Pasternak, Gilbert Rozman, Sophie Sa, G. William Skinner, and Arthur Wolf cited in the appendix.

17 See the articles and books by George Barclay, Richard Barrett, Robert Eng, James Lee, Burton Pasternak, Sophie Sa, and Arthur Wolf cited in the appendix.

18 David Keightly, "Main Trends in American Studies of Chinese History: Mesolithic through Ming," a paper presented at this same panel on Chinese Historical Studies in America, a centennial session of the American Historical Association Anniversary Meeting, Chicago, 29 December 1984.

19 I base this summary largely on ongoing research by Arthur Wolf and myself.

20 Charles Tilly, "The Old New Social History and the New Old Social History" Review 7.3 (Winter 1984):363-406 is a recent summary of the state of field in comparative social history.

TABLE ONE

## THE POPULATION HISTORY OF CHINA BEFORE 1911: THE STATE OF THE FIELD

Dates of Publication of Books and Articles from 1935-1984

	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>Western Languages</u>	<u>Total</u>
1935-1939	11	-	11
1940-1944	3	-	3
1945-1949	4	1	5
1950-1954	1	2	3
1955-1959	16	3	19
1960-1964	5	5	10
1965-1969	1	2	3
1970-1974	2	4	6
1975-1979	9	9	18
1980-1984	<u>117</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>136</u>
Totals	169	45	214

Sources: See Appendix.

## APPENDIX

## THE POPULATION HISTORY OF CHINA BEFORE 1911: THE STATE OF THE FIELD

## Bibliography of Published Books and Articles from 1935-1984

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